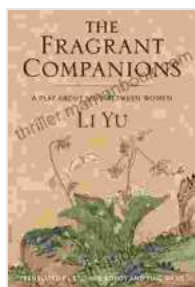


# Love's Sublime Song: Exploring Translations of Sapphic Poetry from the Asian Classics

Love, in all its myriad forms, has been a subject of poetic expression since time immemorial. But when we delve into the literary traditions of Asia, we discover a rich vein of Sapphic poetry that has been largely overlooked by the mainstream.

Sapphic poetry, named after the renowned Greek poetess Sappho, celebrates the love between women. It is characterized by its evocative language, passionate imagery, and exploration of universal themes such as desire, longing, and loss.



## The Fragrant Companions: A Play About Love Between Women (Translations from the Asian Classics)

by Lorraine Heath

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 1336 KB

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

Print length : 309 pages

Paperback : 186 pages

Item Weight : 9 ounces

Dimensions : 6 x 0.42 x 9 inches

Screen Reader: Supported



In recent years, there has been a growing interest in translating Sapphic poetry from the Asian classics. These translations have opened up new

horizons for readers, allowing them to explore the diverse ways in which love and desire have been expressed across cultures and time periods.

### **Japan: The Heian Era**

During the Heian era (794-1185), Japan produced a flourishing literary tradition that included numerous female poets who wrote openly about their love for other women.

Among the most famous of these poets is Ono no Komachi, known for her elegant waka poems that explored the complexities of love and heartbreak.



***“A pitiful heart, That knows what it loves not, And yet yearns;  
'Tis not the man I met, 'Tis his shadow that I love.”***

***- Ono no Komachi***

Another notable Heian era poet is Izumi Shikibu, whose passionate love poems were often addressed to her female companions.



***“My heart is breaking In secret for you, For when you're my  
lover I'll be unbelievably happy, And when we're apart I'll long  
for you.”***

***- Izumi Shikibu***

### **China: The Tang Dynasty**

China's Tang dynasty (618-907) was a golden age of poetry, and it produced a number of female poets who wrote about love between women.

One such poet is Yu Xuanji, who was known for her free-spirited nature and her passionate love for her female companions.



***“I dream of you by night, I think of you by day; My body and my soul Are all entangled by you.*”**

***You should know my heart, And soften your own mind; In the world of love I want to be your equal.””***

***- Yu Xuanji***

Another notable Tang dynasty poet is Xue Tao, who was known for her elegant poetry and her close relationships with other female poets.



***“The falling peach blossoms Dance and flutter in showers, Blown by the spring wind; Love's memories Rise and fall, Like the petals of a cherry.””***

***- Xue Tao***

### **Korea: The Joseon Dynasty**

During the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), Korea also produced a number of female poets who wrote about love between women.

One such poet is Hwang Jin-i, who was known for her wit and her passionate love for her female companions.



***“I gaze at the moon, My heart filled with love, Longing for you,  
My beloved.***

***The moonlight shines On the empty pavilion, Where I sit alone,  
Thinking of you.”***

***- Hwang Jin-i***

Another notable Joseon dynasty poet is Kim Saeng, who wrote about her love for women in a more subtle and understated way.



***“My heart aches As I gaze at the autumn leaves, Turning  
yellow and falling Like my love for you.***

***The wind blows softly, Carrying away my tears, As I watch you  
Leave me alone.”***

***- Kim Saeng***

## **Translations and Cultural Context**

Translating Sapphic poetry from the Asian classics is a challenging task that requires not only linguistic skills but also a deep understanding of the cultural context in which the poems were written.

The languages and cultures of Asia are vastly diverse, and this diversity is reflected in the ways in which love and desire have been expressed in literature.

For example, in some Asian cultures, there is a strong tradition of same-sex marriage and lifelong companionship. This is reflected in the poetry of female poets who write about their love for other women in a frank and unashamed way.

In other Asian cultures, however, same-sex relationships have been historically stigmatized or even criminalized. This has led to a more subdued and indirect expression of love and desire in literature.

Translators must be mindful of these cultural differences when translating Sapphic poetry from the Asian classics. They must strive to convey the original meaning and intent of the poems while also making them accessible to a contemporary audience.

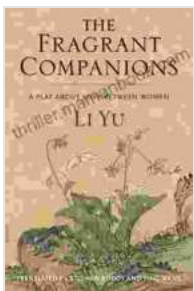
The translations of Sapphic poetry from the Asian classics offer a unique and valuable window into the diverse ways in which love and desire have been expressed across cultures and time periods.

These poems celebrate the beauty, passion, and longing of love between women. They challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality and offer a glimpse into the hidden histories of same-sex relationships in Asia.

By exploring these translations, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the human experience and the universal themes that unite us all.



Ukiyo-e print depicting women playing go, a traditional Japanese board game. (Image public domain)



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